

A case study of youth participatory evaluation in co-curricular service learning

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Abstract: This paper examines the practice of participatory evaluation through an exploratory single case study of the Evaluation Team of Books & Beyond, a co-curricular service-learning program of the Global Village Living-Learning Center at Indiana University. The paper, which is authored by three undergraduate members of the evaluation team and their faculty advisor, juxtaposes the process of conducting the evaluation and reporting the results with reflections from the Evaluation Team participants on conducting youth participatory action research, which offers a means of improving youth-serving programs and developing a greater understanding of why youth choose to participate in these programs. In their review of the implementation of their evaluation project, the team noted that the difficulties of getting past lessons learned to methodological rigor in service-learning evaluation are compounded by the realities of engaging in a student-faculty partnership in a co-curricular service-learning context.

Keywords: living-learning centers, student-faculty partnerships, reflection, action research

In 2010–11, undergraduate students from the Indiana University Global Village Living-Learning Center implemented a youth participatory evaluation of Books & Beyond, a student-led, collaborative, co-curricular service-learning project founded in 2008. Their purpose was to identify the areas where Books & Beyond was working well and other areas where the experiences of the participants could be improved. Upon completion of the evaluation, all evaluation team participants reflected on the experience of being involved with the evaluation of the project, including working closely with each other, and participatory evaluation itself. The study presented here centers on the reflections of the participants following the completion of the evaluation project and focuses on a single exploratory research question: What lessons about the process may be learned from conducting a youth participatory evaluation in the context of a student-led co-curricular service-learning project?

We begin with descriptions of the IU Global Village Living-Learning Center and its Books & Beyond International Service Project. Theoretical foundations for the study, research design, and Evaluation Team reflections follow. While our purpose is not to report on the results of the evaluation itself, we will also provide a few highlights from the evaluation report and its impact.

I. The Global Village Living-Learning Center.

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The Global Village Living-Learning Center, where Smith, Stevenson and Ryan lived for part of their undergraduate studies, is one of several residential learning communities on the IU Bloomington campus. Sponsored by the IU College of Arts and Sciences, the Global Village attracts students who are interested in international studies and foreign languages, regardless of their majors. The focus on international interests is a departure from the traditional language house, where students share a residence for the purpose of practicing common foreign languages together. The Global Village also offers formal and informal learning opportunities throughout the academic year, including the introductory “Q” course taught by peer instructors, which invites students to consider the political, social, cultural and economic dimensions of globalization and their roles in the process.

Living-learning centers such as the Global Village provide an academically enriched environment that makes residential halls more than simply places where students live and study. Through curricular and co-curricular activities on a shared theme or common interest, these learning communities integrate learning into the daily lives of the residents and mitigate the sense of disconnection between academics and ‘real life’ that undergraduates often experience. Academic living-learning communities have been shown to have positive effects on student satisfaction, retention and academic achievement (Forest & Kinser, 2002; Inkelaas, 1999; Inkelaas et al., 2006; Inkelaas & Weisman, 2003) and have been recognized for their track record in promoting experiential learning and critical application of new skills (Brower & Inkelaas, 2010).

II. Books & Beyond International Service Project.

Because the Global Village strives to create a close-knit, diverse community of learners, the director of the center and his staff partnered with IU alumni and faculty to create Books & Beyond in 2008. The project was developed as a co-curricular service-learning activity that would provide a focal point for resident activities, while developing leadership skills and enriching educational experience. Over time, Books & Beyond has developed into a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration between the Global Village and two partners: TEAM Charter Schools: A KIPP Region, located in Newark, NJ, and the Kabwende Primary School, located in Kinigi, Rwanda. The project partners work together to engage young students at TEAM and Kabwende Primary School in authoring, illustrating, publishing and marketing collections of short stories. Since 2008, the project has printed five volumes of *The World is Our Home*, a collection of stories written and illustrated by young authors. Each participant receives a copy of the book, and in Rwanda these books have provided much needed reading material for primary school students. Books & Beyond has received considerable local media attention and has won several awards for youth service and experiential learning. In 2013, the books will be available in digital format.

Books & Beyond embodies the living-learning center philosophy by aiming to increase students’ civic engagement, promote student retention, and develop practical skills through tutoring and mentoring opportunities, leadership opportunities, cross-cultural communication, project management, public speaking and fund-raising. Because Books & Beyond is co-curricular, all of the students engaging in the process of developing the books receive no academic credit for their efforts.

A. Project Organization.

Although living-learning center staff and university faculty played more active roles in the founding and development of Books & Beyond, the nature of the project called for ever-increasing student involvement and control in planning, managing, and evaluating the project each year. As we will demonstrate with the Evaluation Team, this desire to ensure that the project is truly student-led is taken very seriously by the project participants and their mentors.

Numbers demonstrate how the project has thrived since beginning in 2008. Twenty-five Global Village students were involved with Books & Beyond in its inaugural year (2008–9). Twelve TEAM students participated in the project and contributed stories to the collection. In 2009–10, forty-six Global Village residents and twelve TEAM students joined in the project. In 2010–11, fifty-five Books & Beyond participants represented 33% of the total population, with 18% rejoining the project for a second or third year, and fourteen TEAM students participated (see Figure 1). These trends in growth have continued in 2011–12 and 2012–13. Each year, a majority of the Indiana University participants are first-year students; approximately one-third of all Global Village residents have chosen to be involved in Books & Beyond.

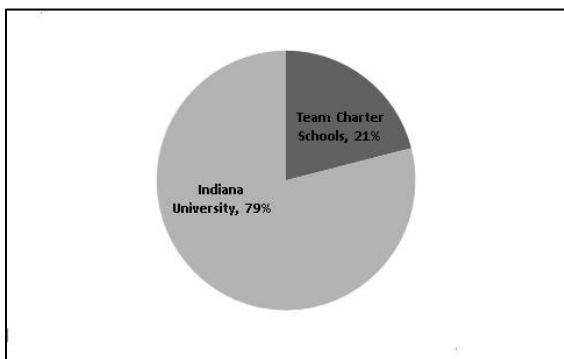


Figure 1. U.S. Participants in Books & Beyond (2010–11).

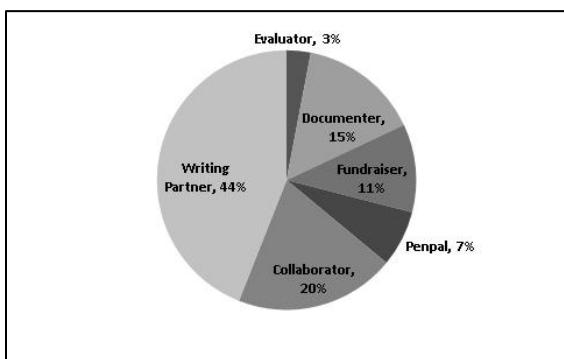


Figure 2. U.S. Participant Roles in Books & Beyond (2010–11).

Participants can volunteer with Books & Beyond in several ways. The TEAM students mainly work as writers and illustrators. Indiana University students who elect to be Writing Partners are paired up with TEAM students to work on crafting their stories. This role is the most common, as 44% of the Indiana University participants in the project are Writing Partners (see Fig. 2). The second most common team, the Collaborators (20%), helps to ensure that the stories are linguistically and culturally relevant. For instance, they teach the writers to avoid mentioning aspects of their lives that might be unfamiliar to Rwandan students, such as playing video games

or going to a fast-food restaurant. The Collaborators also develop skills in formatting and book design while editing over thirty stories each year. Other students maintain pen pal relationships with teachers at Kabwende Primary School (7%). The Fundraisers (11%) write grants and raise approximately \$20,000 each year. The Documenting Team (15%) creates short promotional videos that share Books & Beyond's challenges and successes. The Evaluation Team (3%) evaluates the impact of the project and looks for ways to improve it. And the Leadership Team takes an active role in organizing all of the teams, with a leadership team member designated as the head of each individual team. In 2010-11, most participants contributed one or two hours per week (see Figure 3).

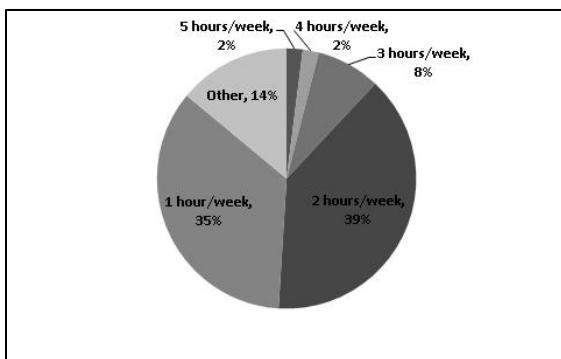


Figure 3. Hours Devoted Per Week to Books & Beyond by U.S. Participants (2010–11).

B. Project Timeline.

Several major events characterize Books & Beyond's annual activities (see Table 1). Work on the book begins in the early fall and is concluded in late April, when the book is sent to the printer. In October, the TEAM students visit IU, tour the campus, meet with their Global Village writing partner, and begin working on their stories together. Between October and January, the writing partners converse three times over Skype. They also use social networking such as Facebook, Twitter, e-mailing, and text messaging to keep up informally. In January, the Global Village students go to Newark over the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day weekend to hold work sessions so the writing partners can complete their stories together. In the summer, students from the Global Village and TEAM travel to Rwanda to distribute the books to the students at Kabwende Primary School and to help the Rwandan students work on their stories for the next year's collection. As of 2012, Books & Beyond has produced four volumes of stories and distributed over 8,000 copies to students in Rwanda. In the second, third, and fourth years, a total of sixty Rwandan students contributed their stories to the book.

III. Youth Participatory Evaluation in Co-curricular Service Learning.

Adding a youth-led evaluation team in the second year fit well with the goal of increasing student leadership in Books & Beyond. We worked from a Vygotskian (1978) theoretical foundation that posits that learning through action research can be developmental and participatory. Because the approach recognizes the expertise and leadership qualities of all participants, regardless of age or status, and helps to balance power relationships, the benefits of youth participatory evaluation can include transformation of ways of knowing (Checkoway, Dobbie, & Richards-Schuster, 2003). YPE helps to build social and civic competencies, self-

confidence and social capital, while encouraging identity exploration and formation (Sabo, 2003, 2008) by allowing participants opportunities to enact roles that normally would not be within the realm of possibility in traditional classes or activities (Heath, 2000). As a form of participatory action research, YPE follows a reflective spiral in which participants collaboratively examine a question of community interest by following devising questions, collecting and interpreting data, and then reflecting on the process (McIntyre, 2008; Walter, 2009). Participants can be empowered when the results of their evaluation work are applied to their programs (Gong & Wright, 2008). Given this potential, youth organizers and researchers engaged in youth participatory research have opined that "*not* involving young people as researchers constitutes a missed opportunity for evaluation research" (Krenichyn et al, 2007, p. 603; London, Zimmerman, & Erbstein, 2003). Without engaging youth, a gap may exist between the adults performing the evaluation and the youth participants, who are acutely aware of the project and its impact on them and their communities. London, Zimmerman, and Erbstein (2003) have noted that "connecting youth, organizational, and community development can produce generative and self-sustaining processes that serve to address key social issues and revitalize communities and the organizations and individuals within them" (p. 35).

Table 1. Timeline for Major Books & Beyond Activities

Fall Semester	Leadership team issues a call for participation. TEAM Charter Schools students visit IU to meet their writing mentors and begin working on their stories. Students continue writing with their mentors via Skype and phone.
Spring Semester	Students meet again, this time in Newark, NJ, to finish the stories. Editing and revision of stories for <i>The World is Our Home</i> . Book sent to the publisher for printing.
Summer	Students from the U.S. travel to Rwanda to visit Kabwende School and deliver the books. Rwandan students write their stories to be included in next year's volume.

Because it can encourage growth that occurs beyond the margins of traditional learning arrangements, participatory action research methodology fits well with co-curricular service learning. The co-curricular variety, which is less frequently studied, aspires to the same ideals as curricular service learning, but does not occur in credit-bearing courses. Co-curricular service learning provides opportunities for participants to work outside of the expected roles of undergraduates as learners or consumers of knowledge. As with service learning for credit-bearing courses, one of the major requirements of co-curricular service learning is the emphasis on giving equal weight to service as well as learning (Keen & Hall, 2009) and benefiting both the service providers and the recipients equally (Furco, 2003). This emphasis on both service and learning distinguishes curricular and co-curricular service learning from other forms of experiential learning such as volunteerism, internships, or community service, which may emphasize service or learning, but not both.

Recent scholarship on teaching and learning (SoTL) values student-faculty partnerships in participatory research has emphasized the need for learning experiences that are both active and integrative. Recent research has shown that undergraduates valued learning opportunities that are characterized by experiential learning, significant interactions with faculty members, meaningful peer relationships, and scope for leadership and responsibility (Bowen et al., 2011).

Literature on training students for involvement in participatory evaluation is relatively sparse. We relied on an account of a similar student-faculty partnership by Tagor and Cuellar (2008), who described seven steps for designing and implementing a project: (1) Project planning and start-up; (2) Team-building (including critical thinking, skills development); (3) Research design and application; (4) Skills development (e.g. interview skills); (5) Data analysis and documentation of findings; (6) Final report (including presentations and publications); and (7) Action planning. We have adopted this organizing heuristic for reflecting on the first year of the Evaluation Team. In the next two sections, we will provide a description of the evaluation team and a short recount of the evaluation project as we implemented it. Following these sections, we will present the results of our reflections on the process of implementing the “2010–11 Books & Beyond Evaluation.”

IV. Forming the Evaluation Team.

Stevenson majored in Gender Studies and Human Biology and lived in the Global Village for several semesters. After working with the Documenting Team during her freshman year, she was recruited to serve as the leader of the Evaluation Team in her second year with Books & Beyond and received an AmeriCorps Service-Engagement position, allowing her to earn an AmeriCorps Education Award for her service. She joined the Evaluation Team based on the lead description provided by Books & Beyond, thinking she could use the service-learning and integrative approach of Human Biology in the role of Team Leader.

Smith joined the team in his second year in Books & Beyond, after serving on the Fundraising Team the year before, when he had been a freshman and a resident in the Global Village. As a Direct Admit Scholar in Secondary Education and Spanish, he planned to study abroad in Spain during his junior year and was interested in finding opportunities to engage in research activities with faculty members. Joining the evaluation team enabled him to try out some new skillsets, including interacting with participants on the project. He is serving as the Evaluation Team Lead for the fall semester of 2012.

Ryan officially joined the team in spring 2011, although she was significantly involved in the collection of video interviews in the fall due to her leadership role in the Documenting Team. She was a founding member of Books & Beyond, serving as a Documenting Team member during her first year with the project, then expanding her activities as the Documenting Team Lead for the academic year 2010–11, also serving as an AmeriCorps Service-Engagement Corps member alongside Stevenson. She became interested in the evaluation’s team work as a way for her to better understand the project’s scope and impact in the hopes that it would help to improve the project for future years.

Samuelson joined the Books & Beyond project at its inception as a faculty advisor, when she was a new faculty member. During the 2008–09 and 2009–10 academic years, she worked intensively on the planning and editing of the first and second volumes of *The World is Our Home*, planning the first trips to TEAM in Newark, NJ, and to Kabwende Primary School in Kinigi, Rwanda, and engaging in fundraising that helped the project get started. Over time, though, Samuelson has become less involved in the daily activities of the project, but serves on the Advisory Board and assists primarily in matters of evaluation and curriculum development. Samuelson joined the Evaluation Team late in the fall semester, after the first faculty advisor to the team was not able to continue with the position.

V. The 2010–11 Books & Beyond Evaluation.

The methodology for the Books & Beyond Evaluation reflected the needs and concerns of the group at large. We applied a single case participatory action research design to investigate the process of forming the evaluation team and conducting the evaluation. We were initially interested in learning why the participants had chosen to join the project and what their experiences had been like. Our goal was primarily to provide information that would serve to make the project stronger in the upcoming academic year. We provide here a brief description of the project and its results here for the purpose of contextualizing our reflection, as our primary purpose for this paper is to discuss the experience of engaging in the research. Patton has noted that increasing rigor in qualitative research entails getting past “lessons learned” to methodological rigor in service-learning evaluation, but we found that addressing this concern is compounded by the realities of engaging in a student-faculty partnership in a co-curricular service-learning context (Patton, 2012).

A. Data Collection and Analysis.

Early in the academic year, we reviewed methods of evaluation and developed a tentative model for Books & Beyond, one that would provide an effective, interactive learning experience for everyone involved. Consistent with the goals of the project regarding student involvement, development, and learning, the team decided to practice participatory evaluation, which may be defined as a process in which “researchers, facilitators, or professional evaluators collaborate in some way with individuals, groups, or communities who have a decided stake in the program, development project, or other entity being evaluated” (King, Cousins, & Whitmore, 2007, p. 87). We adopted several strategies for collecting data from project participants, including interviews, arts-based activities, and a written survey.

Our first round of data collection occurred during the fall visit to Bloomington in 2010. Thirteen middle and high school students from TEAM Charter Schools in Newark, NJ (Rise Academy, grades 5-8; TEAM Academy, grades 5-8; and Newark Collegiate Academy, grades 9-12) visited Indiana University for a weekend in October to meet their writing mentors and get a taste of college life. We worked with the Documenting Team, led by Ryan to conduct short, videotaped interviews with each of the writing partners. Each participant was asked to why he or she wanted to be involved with Books & Beyond and how he or she felt about being involved. The arts-based activities invited participants to express their feelings about the project through visual art mosaics, molding clay sculptures, and devised theatre. Participants were able to generate pieces of artwork and creative writing throughout the weekend. The devised theatre activity was part of a final workshop, during which we asked the Writing Partners to create short performances depicting how they felt about their experiences during the weekend visit.

We analyzed the data that we collected during the October weekend by reviewing the videotaped interviews and theatre activities and looking for prominent themes. We met regularly in Samuelson’s office to discuss the results of our content-based analysis. We noted that the participants valued the new mentoring relationships that they were forming and the fun times they were able to share during the intensive weekend. One devised theatre piece about social action particularly highlighted some of the participants’ favorite parts about the project; another skit discussed the value of the interpersonal connections generated by the project. Additionally, the performances served to illuminate some of the frustrations and negative feelings that the

students had regarding the weekend's activities. Several of the participants communicated their exhaustion from the long days and their desire to have more free time. They also displayed their frustration with the evaluation activities and the constant presence of the Documenting Team's cameras.

In January, the Evaluation Team accompanied the Writing Partners on their trip to Newark, NJ, to finish their stories and spend time with their writing mentees. During one of the group meetings, we presented the results of our analysis of the qualitative data we collected during the fall visit to the group. We also distributed the written survey, which was completed by fifty participants (TEAM Schools: 13; IU Global Village: 37). The first section asked participants to rate the severity of the problems or challenges that they experienced throughout the year (see Appendix). The second section, a modified version of the Civic-Minded Graduate Scale developing by the Center for Service-Learning at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (Steinberg, Hatcher, & Bringle, 2011), asked participants to consider how their participation in the project helped them to develop a sense of connection to their schools and to their local and global communities. Other questions explored their interest in community involvement or service, their desire to pursue careers in community service, and their sense of confidence in their ability to make contributions to their communities.

B. Our Results.

The resounding theme emerging from our analysis was that students at both Indiana University and TEAM believed that Books & Beyond would help them to have an impact on their world. Students from both groups joined the project in the hope of bringing about some type of social change, through providing books to Rwandan schoolchildren or through increasing cross-cultural communication and understanding.

Both groups of participants also offered a number of recommendations for how the project might be improved. In the written surveys, many participants cited time constraints as the main challenge or struggle that they encountered throughout their participation. However, additional concerns were raised throughout the process in reference to the Evaluation Team itself and its methods. Through the mosaics, devised theatre activity, and various points throughout the intensive fall weekend, participants displayed frustration with the redundancy of the Evaluation Team's activities and constantly being asked, "How does this make you feel?" Taking this into consideration, final reflections were made about the process as a whole and what might be learned from this case study of youth participatory evaluation.

We noted that most of the Global Village and TEAM Writing Partners believed that Books & Beyond provided them with an opportunity to "make a difference," although the undergraduate Global Village participants were more likely to view the project as an opportunity to build their resumes. Most of the TEAM students saw the project purely as a form of social action. For these younger participants, the opportunity to engage in a social action project that they had control over was an especially salient factor in their decision to join the project. We also noted that all of the writing partners became bored and disengaged at some points during the writing workshops, and also during the evaluation activities.

Both groups agreed that the biggest benefits were connecting to their global community

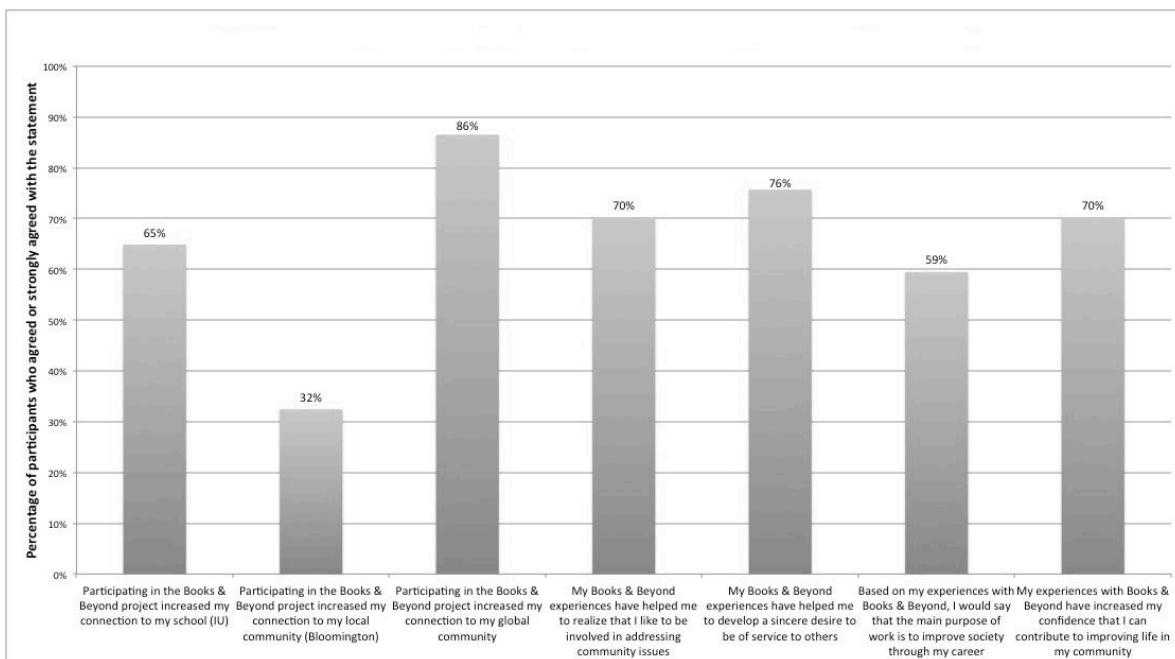


Figure 4. Perceived Benefits by IU Global Village Students of Participation in Books & Beyond (2010–11).

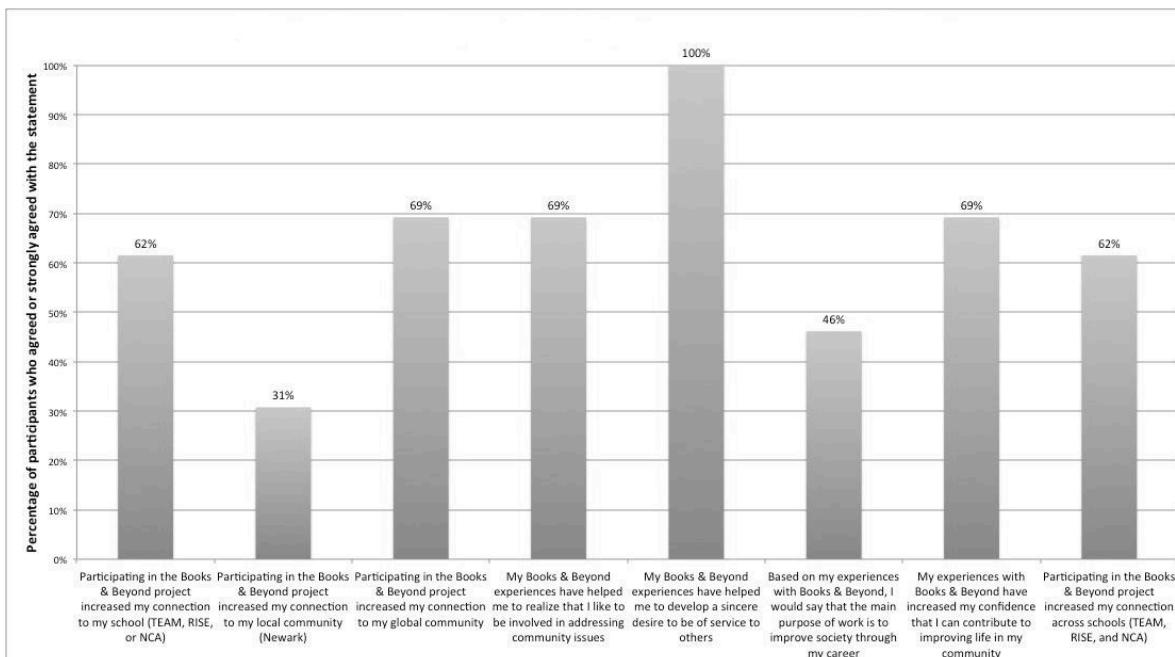


Figure 5. Perceived Benefits by TEAM Students of Participation in Books & Beyond (2010–11).

and servicing others, and both groups had the highest percentage of students agreeing with two statements: "My Books & Beyond experiences have helped me to develop a sincere desire to be of service to others" and "Participating in Books & Beyond increased my connection to my global community" (see Figures 4 & 5). All of the TEAM Schools students agreed or strongly agreed that the project had helped to increase their desire to be of service to others, whereas 76% of Indiana University students agreed or strongly agreed. The Indiana University students

showed strong agreement that Books & Beyond had increased their connection with the global community; 86% agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 4). TEAM students were more likely to agree that their Books & Beyond experiences had increased their connection to their global community, increased their desire to address community issues and increased their confidence in their ability to be involved in addressing community issues (Figure 5). TEAM students show a stronger benefit of serving others in their communities and globally, while the Indiana University students felt they most benefited in the area of global connections.

The Indiana University students seemed primarily concerned with the amount of time devoted to writing and training; thirty percent indicated that time constraints were a “big problem” or a “really big problem” (see Figure 6). In the open-ended questions, some stated that they would prefer more time with their writing mentees devoted to socializing or working on their stories and less time spent in meetings. Some of their comments included:

1. “More quality time with my writing partner.”
2. “We could have more social and work time.”
3. “You probably should just cut back on the lectures.”
4. “Some changes that I think should be made are adding more times to simply be with your writing partner.”
5. “Many GV students express displeasure often times with being documented. More effort in explaining the crucial roles we all play, even the documenting team.”
6. “Hold more Rwandan culture nights.”

The TEAM students were also concerned about time constraints. Twenty-three percent indicated that time constraints were a “big problem” or a “really big problem.” The TEAM students were more likely to indicate that the Skype sessions, the Saturday meetings with their GV writing partners, and the time needed to maintain communication with their GV writing partners were also significant challenges (see Figure 7). These students desired additional time to Skype with their partners and suggested holding writing and mentoring sessions during the week instead of the weekend. Some of their comments in the open-ended questions on the survey included the following:

1. “I think that you should make what you want accomplished clearer.”
2. “Next we could have more Skype sessions and more time to communicate.”
3. “I’ve really enjoyed the program. Seems like we could do a little more with maybe having Skype sessions with students from Rwanda/Kenya.”
4. “Next year we should have more classes that help us learn about Rwandan culture.”

During the devised theater event, we observed both the Indiana University students and the TEAM students speaking optimistically about the power of the project to break down barriers. The students expressed a desire to have more free time with their writing partners so they could get to know one another without having structured activities. They were highly motivated to accomplish the task of completing their stories on deadline.

Reviewing the results of the 2010–11 Books & Beyond Evaluation helped to shed light on why students chose to be involved and whether they thought that project helped them to be community-minded. Most of the challenges that the students highlighted were addressed in action steps that the Books & Beyond Leadership Team incorporated into subsequent years. Many respondents expressed a desire for more one-on-one time to work with and get to know their writing partners. Respondents also cited an interest in learning more about the nation of Rwanda. In response to these requests, 2011–12 and 2012–13 saw increased opportunities during the October and January Weekends for writing partners to spend time with one another and work

on their stories. With the Evaluation Team as a framework, Books & Beyond hired a student intern in 2011–12 with the primary task of developing a strategic plan for the project that included both short-term and long-term goals. Most recently, the 2012–13 academic year saw the creation of a Rwanda Culture Team within Books & Beyond, which hosts a series of informative events each semester at the Global Village Living-Learning Center addressing the history and culture of Rwanda.

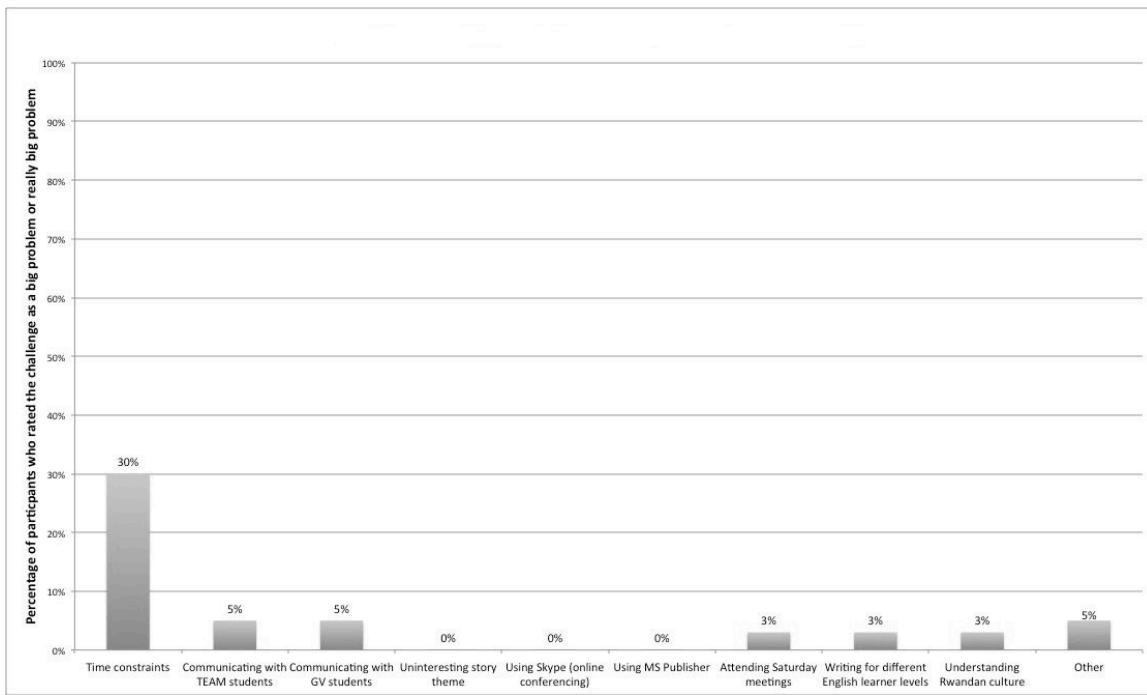


Figure 6. Challenges Experienced by IU Global Village Students in Books & Beyond (2010–11).

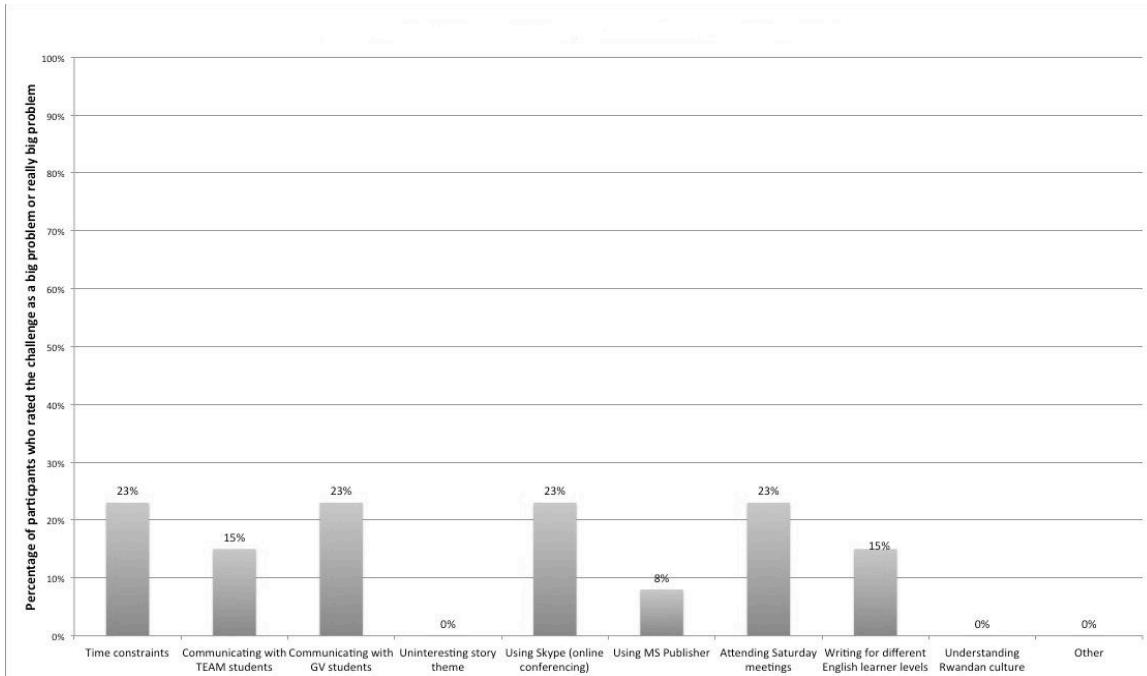


Figure 7. Challenges Experienced by TEAM Students in Books & Beyond (2010–11).

D. Action Steps.

The action steps phase covers the presentation of findings and their application to the project. We made a full presentation to the Books & Beyond Leadership Team at the end of the year. As a result of our findings, the project made some significant changes in the subsequent year. General awareness of and appreciation for evaluation of the project increased among leadership team members, and methods of evaluation were altered to better suit the project's needs and to avoid overwhelming student participants with redundant questioning. The Public Relations Team was added to the project and began publishing the *Amakuru*² newsletter. Rwandan culture nights became a regular activity for Indiana University students engaged in the project. And, finally, students were given more "down time" together during the fall and spring visits to encourage writing partners to get to know each other better.

We presented our results of our study at several forums, including the IU Women in Science Research Day Conference, the IU Hutton Honors College Undergraduate Research Symposium, and the Indiana Campus Compact Service Engagement Summit.

VI. Reflecting on the 2010–11 Books & Beyond Evaluation.

Although the study resulted in the collection of a wealth of data regarding participants' thoughts, feelings, and preferences, the process of conducting the youth participatory evaluation was shown to be just as important as the evaluation itself (Voakes, 2003). It gave us an opportunity to practice and develop a new set of skills in research collection and analysis, evaluation implementation, and non-profit program support. This type of evaluation gave us the tools we needed to develop and validate knowledge while also addressing the development of Books & Beyond.

During the spring semester, we realized that the process of engaging in the Books & Beyond Evaluation was just as interesting as the results of the evaluation. We agreed that after we had completed the evaluation, we would reflect on the process and note what we had learned about the process of youth participatory evaluation as well as areas for improvement for future evaluations. During the summer and early fall of the following academic year (2011–12), each of the team members met individually with Samuelson to discuss their reflections on the seven distinct steps in designing and implementing a youth participatory evaluation program (Tagor & Cuellar, 2008): (1) Project planning and start-up; (2) Team-building (including critical thinking, skills development); (3) Research design and application; (4) Skills development (e.g. interview skills); (5) Data analysis and documentation of findings; (6) Final report (including presentations and publications); and (7) Action planning. In the remainder of this section, we will address our reflections on each of these steps in turn.

A. Reflections on Project Planning and Start-Up.

In the project planning and start-up phase, the Evaluation Team was assembled and started its planning meetings. Smith was hired in August by the Books & Beyond Leadership team, and helped to recruit Stevenson. Samuelson was involved in the process, but she did not step in as the faculty advisor until November, when the first advisor assigned to the team was no longer able to continue. She was aware of how the team was developing and how the planning was proceeding,

²"Amakuru" is a Kinyarwanda greeting that means "Hello" or "How's it going?"

but was not directly involved. In some ways, the planning phase was the most difficult because of the decision-making that needed to go into decision what questions to ask, what types of data to collect, and how to analyze it. Each of the team members also had to complete the training required to getting approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, a process that proved very time-consuming. Looking back at this period, Smith felt that the early planning phase of the project involved too many planning meetings in which ideas got discussed, but decisions didn't get made:

I prefer working with a hierarchy in a team; no clear chain of command. It wasn't really clear who was making decision. [...] The way I work as a learner, just give me two or three different methods and a plan of attack (Interview, August 3, 2011).

He also felt that it would have been helpful to read related research early in the year. Last minute changes to the plans were frustrating for all of the team members.

B. Reflections on Team-Building.

When Ryan joined the team in the spring, the team spent several weekends together researching and preparing for their poster presentations, and they felt that they worked well together during this process. At this point, the team began to see the value in spending time completing work together as a means of building camaraderie and improving the quality of their work. This seemed to be more motivating and engaging than the multiple, long, planning sessions held during the first semester. The students also bonded over the shared sense of challenge and urgency presented by their goals to present in on campus conferences during the spring semester. The need to complete a presentation and poster display brought the group together in working towards a common goal.

C. Reflections on Research Design and Application.

During the design and application phase, we observed that every little action that the writing partners performed counted, because their activities together—enjoying free time, eating lunch, falling asleep during lessons, speaking in groups during activities, etc., helped to strengthen their mentoring relationships. Because of this, we emphasized the importance of noting even the “bad” or “embarrassing” things that happened. We also discovered the importance of allowing for enough time to analyze all of the data. This time-consuming process worked best when we planned to do it over the winter break.

A few details about the leadership of the team arose at this stage in the reflection. Smith expressed a preference for greater control by faculty members, and would have preferred more top-down instructions on what to do and how to do it. Stevenson wanted to learn more about different techniques for interviewing, and wondered how the outcomes might have differed based on different types of questions. Stevenson wanted to collect more statistical data at the beginning of the year, and not just at the end of the project.

Stevenson also felt that although it was important to have multiple types of data, she would have preferred skipping some of the arts-based activities:

Our first set of data collection would have been more helpful if we had had less “elementary art.” I wish that it had been less scattered, like having everyone just sit down and write a poem or something, instead of waiting until someone tried to sit down and do their homework. It was really difficult to get a response that was more than just, “I’m

exhausted." [...] I do like the art form. I think it was really helpful, but a lot of the supplies were really hard to carry around. And it was hard to keep the pieces of art intact. It was really difficult (Interview, September 16, 2011).

D. Reflections on Skills Development.

Smith noted that being involved in the project helped him to rethink his plans for a future career:

I feel that I developed at least some sort of foundation of research skills. I developed more of an appreciation for reading research that is out there than I had ever done for any class, maybe because this was research that was relevant to what I was doing. I started to really notice things in a research paper, like, 'oh they're citing this author. I should go back and look at the research this person has done.' Or like, 'what is this person saying versus what this individual is saying?' That came more into play in the spring when we were starting to do the poster presentations around campus. I enjoyed that because I never really made any sort of contribution to IU in that way, to attend a conference. It was a really cool experience for me. And I vastly improved my presentational skills, which is always a work in progress for everyone. Getting involved in evaluation got me thinking more and more about working in academia, which is something I hadn't really considered prior to this past spring (Interview, August 3, 2011).

Ryan noted that many of the skills that she had acquired during her involvement with Books & Beyond had little to do with her academic classes. She reported developing a greater appreciation for reading research, more than she had gained in any of her classes. The experiences were valuable, but she had difficulty translating this into a résumé or a cover letter:

A lot of times, I'll write in cover letters, or something like, 'I've learned more or just as much through doing this project as I have in the classroom here.' Not only is it awesome because I'm working on this completely different side of myself than what is my major and my minor but it's also just great because I'm learning though my own initiative, too, I learned all of that awesome stuff about Rwanda and about evaluation and really cool stuff last year, and I never would have gotten that in a classroom, because I never would have taken a class on it, and there isn't one on it. And it was just great. I wish that more people could have that experience. Or I wish that it would count for something (Interview, September 15, 2011).

Stevenson wished for more training in interview techniques:

I wish we would have learned more about different ways of interviewing people. I would have liked to see different ways students responded depending on the way that we phrased the questions (Interview, September 16, 2011).

E. Reflections on Final Reports and Presentations.

The team agreed that presenting the data at academic conferences and to Books & Beyond members helped to promote the project. Their presentations brought further benefits by helping them to see the importance of what they were doing and by motivating them to keep working. At the end of the 2010–11 Books & Beyond final presentation to the Leadership Team, the Evaluation Team members agreed that writing an article on their results and their experiences would be a valuable next step, and they drafted a report on the results that formed the basis for

the first part of this paper. Stevenson found this step very enjoyable:

The poster was basically a condensed version of the paper. Because there were three of us working on it, we used the time really well and made sure that we didn't procrastinate on it. We spent an entire day together just looking for resources. The next weekend after that, we made the poster from the paper. So it was just a lot of finding and then putting together the stuff and revising. So it worked out really well (Interview, September 16, 2011).

The presentations helped us to demonstrate the importance of our work to other Books & Beyond participants. Smith shared that “[At the Books & Beyond leadership year-end meeting], someone came up to me and said, ‘you guys have been kind of getting on my nerves all year, but now I finally understand why you have done all of this,’ which is really a gratifying moment.”

F. Reflections on Action Steps.

We compiled many of these observations in the *2011 Books & Beyond Evaluation Team Leadership Legacy Manual*, which we made available to the 2011–12 Evaluation Team. Several of our suggestions for future evaluation teams appear in the Appendix. Our team disbanded as Smith left for Spain for a study abroad year, Stevenson focused on completing her studies, and Ryan took on other duties with the Books & Beyond Leadership Team. Despite the team disbanding, all three authors maintained a sense of involvement, to varying degrees, in ensuring the project’s future success and supporting future evaluation teams.

VII. Implications and Future Directions.

Our rationale for this qualitative study was to examine the value of YPE for enhancing learning opportunities for participants and for producing more relevant results for the Books & Beyond project. Our purpose was to examine our experiences and learn from them. Conducting a youth participatory evaluation of Books & Beyond helped us to generate a great wealth of participant insights about the project, providing us with knowledge about what Books & Beyond participants get from their involvement as well as how the project might be improved for the future. We set out to collect data on the success of Books & Beyond, report our findings to the participants and to the broader community, and finally, to reflect on the process of our evaluation project and ways that it could be improved.

The Books & Beyond Evaluation Team has demonstrated how engaging project participants in evaluation has produced an atmosphere conducive to continual project improvement and adjustment for the sake of the greater goal of bringing about social change in the world. In future years, we hope that Books & Beyond will be able to engage the TEAM students more actively in the evaluation process. Furthermore, although we elected not to collect evaluation data from the Rwandan students at Kabwende Primary School, we would like to see this step occur, as the Rwandan students have participated in the project by writing and illustrating their stories and by receiving copies of the book for their personal use. The goal of ensuring that others benefit from our experiences extends not only to the future participants of Books & Beyond, but to other student-faculty teams who may desire to engage in a collaborative evaluation of their co-curricular service activities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Books & Beyond Satisfaction Survey

We want to hear from you about your experience with Books & Beyond so we can make improvements for next year.

I. Part One

1a. I am from [please check your school]: (Indiana University or TEAM)

1b. My gender is (Female or Male).

2. What were your roles in Books & Beyond this year? [check all that apply] (Writing Partner, Collaborator, Pen pal, Fundraiser, Documenter, Evaluator, or other)

3. What was your MAJOR role in Books & Beyond this year? (Writing Partner, Collaborator, Pen pal, Fundraiser, Documenter, Evaluator, or other)

4. For the role that you checked in #3, what are some areas that you would like to do differently, if you were to join Books & Beyond again next year?

5. Approximately how much time did you devote to the project (in all your roles)? (1-2 hour per week; 3-4 hours per week; 5-6 hours per week or Other)

6. We know you faced many challenges in completing the project. Please rate the following: (Very small problem, Small problem, Not a problem, Big problem, Really big problem, Not applicable to me)

- a. time constraints**
- b. communicating with TEAM students**
- c. communicating with GV students**
- d. uninteresting story theme**
- e. using Skype (online conferencing)**
- f. using MS Publisher**
- g. attending Saturday meetings**
- h. writing for different English learner levels**
- i. understanding Rwandan culture**
- j. Other (please specify)**

7. Please suggest some changes we could make for next year that would address these challenges.

8. Why did you decide to be a part of Books & Beyond?

II. Part Two

(Very small problem, Small problem, Not a problem, Big problem, Really big problem, Not applicable to me)

1. Participating in Books & Beyond increased my connection to my school (IU, TEAM Academy, RISE Academy or Newark Collegiate Academy).
2. Participating in Books & Beyond increased my connection to my local community (Newark, NJ, or Bloomington, IN).
3. Participating in Books & Beyond increased my connection to my global community.
4. My Books & Beyond experiences have helped me to realize that I like to be involved in addressing community issues.
5. My Books & Beyond experiences have helped me develop a sincere desire to be of service to others.
6. Based on my experiences with Books & Beyond, I would say that the main purpose of work is to improve society through my career.
7. My experiences with Books & Beyond have increased my confidence that I can contribute to improving life in my community.
8. FOR TEAM STUDENTS ONLY: Participating in Books & Beyond increased my connection across schools (TEAM Academy, RISE Academy and Newark Collegiate Academy).

Appendix 2. Suggestions from the 2011 Books & Beyond Evaluation Team Leadership Legacy Manual

1. Have a casual meeting first where everyone just gets to know one another.
2. Make sure to present yourself as one of the team and not just as the leader. This is a small team, and the other members will be doing almost as much work as you do for Books & Beyond.
3. After the first meeting, establish a weekly meet-up with your teammates that would start the next week. Be sure to contact everyone about the meetings a few days in advance and the day of the meeting so that nobody forgets.
4. Create an agenda for what you want to talk about at the weekly meetings.
5. Be sure to take notes at the meetings so that you don't forget what was discussed, what is coming up, and what needs to be addressed in the future meetings.
6. Working with faculty will give you access to advice that will help you get through any challenges or obstacles. Be sure to include the faculty in all scheduled meetings and updates, even if faculty can't make every meeting or event.
7. Brainstorm ideas for collecting data before addressing your team. It's always good to get the ideas going with your own first, and then the rest of the team will possibly start brainstorming along with you.
8. Once ideas get flowing, take notes of everyone's ideas. Be sure to keep the ideas available until an absolute final decision is made on how you and your team will collect data.
9. Work with your team to choose a few methods on how to collect data. Don't collect data in only one format; this will not be helpful because the writing partners and other students in the project respond to different ways of asking "How do you feel?"
10. Make sure you give everyone enough time to analyze all of the data so that in a near meeting, your team can compare notes. Take notes on major themes you notice and give examples of

them. Make note of any exceptions as well.

11. After discussing what you and your team found in the data, begin making a compilation of your findings.

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